

Dec. 1, 1970

The Shaw-Garrison Affair

By JOHN LEONARD

AMERICAN GROTESQUE. *An Account of the Clay Shaw-Jim Garrison Affair in the City of New Orleans.* By James Kirkwood. 669 pages. Simon & Schuster. \$11.95.

A HERITAGE OF STONE. By Jim Garrison. 253 pages. Putnam. \$8.95.

Bad vibrations.

New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison arrested New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw, charging that Mr. Shaw conspired to assassinate President John F. Kennedy. Mr. Shaw was acquitted by a jury. Mr. Garrison then had Mr. Shaw re-arrested on two charges of perjury. Mr. Shaw is suing Mr. Garrison, and a host of others. The judge at Mr. Shaw's trial has since been arrested in a motel room where stag movies and loose women are alleged to have exhibited themselves. The principal witness against Mr. Shaw has since been arrested for burglary. Mr. Garrison has since been accused of molesting a 13-year-old boy at the New Orleans Athletic Club, which is interesting because Mr. Shaw allegedly had links with the New Orleans homosexual underground.

No, this is not a fiction by Gore Vidal. It is a serialized novel on the front pages of our daily newspapers. Maybe that explains why novelist James Kirkwood—"Good Times/Bad Times"—got obsessed with the subject. Mr. Kirkwood met Mr. Shaw, and believed his story, and so wrote a sympathetic article before the trial (published by *Esquire*) and an indignant article after the trial (quoted by *Playboy*) and this tome-stone of a book (troubling the reviewer). Did Clay Shaw know David Ferrie and Lee Harvey Oswald? Is Jim Garrison paranoid about the Federal government? Or was the whole business were a fevered invention.

'Perjury' Also 'Conspiracy'

It isn't. Mr. Kirkwood argues in "American Grotesque" that Jim Garrison used Clay Shaw to try the Warren Commission report; that Garrison scraped the bottom of the barrel for variously sick and variously intimidated witnesses to smear Shaw; that Garrison's guerrillas sought a jury of sub-par intelligence to benight with bloody

fantasies; that, having empaneled such a jury, they were so upset by the acquittal that they added the insult of "perjury" charges to the injury of "conspiracy" accusations. Unfortunately, Mr. Kirkwood is so conscientious in his reporting that one wonders why so many people claimed to have seen Mr. Shaw with Oswald and Ferrie. Were they all mistaken or lying?

To be sure, conspiracy wasn't proved, and the state embarrassed itself with surreal incompetence. But "conspiracy" is no longer the charge against Shaw; perjury is. We have only Mr. Kirkwood's emotional word on innocence to go by. Such a word isn't conclusive, not even in a book reviewer's court. Mr. Kirkwood's loyalty to a friend is admirable; his taped interviews with all the principals in the first Shaw trial are fascinating; his attention to trivia is in the best parajournalistic tradition—the little boy who cried *Tom Wolfe*. But legitimate questions about John Kennedy's assassination aren't answered according to the buddy system.

Which brings us to Jim Garrison's "A Heritage of Stone." The District Attorney of Orleans Parish argues that Kennedy's assassination can only be explained by a "model" that pins the murder on the Central Intelligence Agency. The C.I.A. could have engineered Dallas in behalf of the military-intelligence-industrial complex that feared the President's disposition toward a détente with the Russians. Mr. Garrison nowhere in his book mentions Clay Shaw, or the botch his office made of Shaw's prosecution; he is, however, heavy on all the other characters who have become familiar to us via late-night talk shows on television. And he insists that the Warren Commission, the executive branch of the government, some members of the Dallas Police Department, the pathologists at Bethesda who performed the second Kennedy autopsy and many, many others must have known they were lying to the American public.

Frankly, I prefer to believe that the Warren Commission did a poor job, rather than a dishonest one. I like to think that Mr. Garrison invents monsters to explain incompetence.